

# Committee on Resources

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Nevada Assembly District 35**

**Testimony  
Before the Committee on Resources  
United States House of Representatives**

**Hearing on the Dispensation of Funds from the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act**

**December 4th, 2003**

Chairman Radanovich, Members of the Committee, thank you for the invitation to speak before you today.

I represent one of Nevada's largest and most rural Assembly Districts. Assembly District 35 encompasses much of rural northern Nevada, including Eureka, Pershing and White Pine Counties and portions of Churchill, Humboldt, Lander and Washoe Counties. The rural character of Assembly District says much about my perspective on public lands management in general and the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act (SNPLMA or Act) in particular.

The SNPLMA is clearly a unique and historically important piece of legislative work. It benefits State of Nevada by 1) supporting Nevada's education programs, 2) helping ensure a sound economic future for southern Nevada's communities, and 3) providing a mechanism to balance southern Nevada's economic needs with resource protection and conservation. Unfortunately, the benefits of SNPLMA are tempered by where you reside in the State.

The SNPLMA is a source of great distress to those who live and work in rural Nevada. The fundamental bone of contention is that the Act imposes a legislative remedy for a localized urban problem that disproportionately impacts residents elsewhere in the State. Within the boundaries of southern Nevada (delineated by the October 2002 Amendment), federal lands are privatized for economic development while other private lands are transferred to public ownership for preservation and conservation. Outside of the SNPLMA boundary only half the equation applies, no lands are privatized, while environmentally sensitive (substitute economically viable) lands are transferred to restrictive public ownership. This inequity has already exacerbated economic hardships in rural Nevada by creating a political and administrative situation that struggling local governments can ill afford. Matters are destined to get worse as land acquisitions erode rural tax bases and undermine local businesses. Outside a generic requirement for consultation during federal land acquisitions, the SNPLMA fails to acknowledge the needs and authorities of any unit of local government or regional governmental entity outside of Clark County.

From a national perspective, new land acquisitions will further test the capacity of American taxpayers to support the growing burden of public lands management. Federal land management agencies are already responsible for improving the condition of 87% of Nevada's land area. These agencies remain sadly underfunded and understaffed. The cost to the health of our forests, grasslands and watersheds is dear. The recent Interior budget impasse is testament to our nation's limited ability to provide adequate long-term funding for management of existing federal lands, let alone new acquisitions.

Rural Nevadans also fear the SNPLMA's indirect tie to water. The Act provides funding to Southern Nevada Water Authority for developing water transmission infrastructure. In regions of the State targeted by Southern Nevada Water Authority for water acquisitions, the SNPLMA is perceived to be a mechanism for accessing rural ground water resources. The Act fails to address the local economic and environmental consequences of exporting water from rural areas.

With these concerns in mind I urge the Committee to pursue amendments to the SNPLMA as follows:

1. Limit expenditure of SNPLMA funds for federal land acquisitions to a fixed geographical area in southern Nevada.
2. Identify all units of local government potentially affected by SNPLMA federal land acquisitions within the boundary and clearly define their roles under the Act.
3. Provide for a full accounting of future costs and benefits incurred by a) potentially impacted local and regional businesses, b) affected units of local government and c) federal agencies for all SNPLMA acquisitions.
4. Earmark SNPLMA expenditures outside the geographical boundary for enhancing management of existing federal lands and facilities.

In summary, the SNPLMA was designed to enhance economic and social conditions in urban Clark County. Neither by content nor by name does the Act pretend to address the needs of Nevada's rural communities. If there is a need to dispose of federal lands and acquire environmentally-sensitive lands in areas outside of southern Nevada, then I strongly recommend a separate legislative effort that can meet the needs of those communities. Many of us have long argued that the SNPLMA would generate enough money to buy most of the valuable private lands in rural northern Nevada. Given that the Round 4 Auction on November 6th grossed over \$127 million to bring the SNPLMA coffers to well over half a billion dollars, there is already enough money on the table to turn all targeted landowners into willing sellers and for enterprising sellers to turn the United States Treasury Special Account their way.

Respectfully,  
Pete Goicoechea  
Nevada Assembly District 35